



WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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"Making decisions to improve the quality of education for ALL kids."

REFLECTIONS—FIRST PEOPLE'S LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROJECT

I believe the process evolved from a sense of urgency stemming from the potential loss of a language(s) and culture(s).

There are several reasons why I felt compelled to support the First People's Language and Culture Committee:

- ✧ For years I have been concerned about the issues facing the tribes of this country, e.g., racism, poverty, inferior education, drug and alcohol abuse, erosion of treaties and agreements between the tribes and the federal government, and the unthinkable loss of their languages and culture. I had the opportunity to visit three reservations while working with the Washington State School Directors Association's (WSSDA) Diversity/Multicultural Awareness Team (D/MAT). We were working on trying to get Native American school board directors more involved with WSSDA and D/MAT. When we were introduced to the tribal leaders and elders, I was immediately struck by what I saw in their faces and eyes. A sadness would come over me because I could see the years of struggle, disappointment, hurt, and anguish. At the same time I could see pride, commitment, determination, and fight to the end. I first felt a sadness in my heart that was immediately followed by feelings of hope and encouragement. The combination of the looks on the faces of the tribal leaders and elders and the feelings in my heart made me realize and better understand the unique struggles of our Tribal Brothers. I also made a commitment to myself that I would do whatever I could to help the tribes in their struggles for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- ✧ The sincerity of the committee and their willingness to share their culture, beliefs, and values with the State Board of Education so that we could better understand their feelings of desperation.
- ✧ I can only imagine what it must feel like to slowly watch your language and culture become extinct right before your eyes, while at the same time watching your children lose sight of who they are with no hope of learning or knowing from whence they came.

For the reasons mentioned I felt that immediate supportive action was in order.

I believe the best way to capture and grow from this experience for all of us is by the reflections that the committee asked for, the committee's in-house way of recording and documenting and telling the story over and over and over to the young ones, to every generation until the end of time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'W. T. Smith Sr.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Warren T. Smith Sr.
State Board of Education
Ninth Congressional District